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Socio-Demographic Factors that Impinge Social Bonding: The Case of Malaysian Youth

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Abstract: Youth is a frequent group that have been put into focus not only in Malaysia even internationally. Youth development issues in Malaysia always get the mass media coverage. Borderless changes in lifestyle in the world give impact to the change of the world's culture. This results in Malaysian youths to experience cultural change. This cultural change not only affects positive youth development in fact it also make youths as a troubled group. Hence, social bonding approach can help youths to undergo a better and balanced lifestyle. This paper describes a quantitative study on socio-demographic factors selected that influence the social bonding youths in Malaysia. The nine social bonding studied were: 1) spirit of citizenship; 2) family communication quality; 3) quality of communication with teacher and adult; 4) time management pattern; 5) level of healthy habit; 6) attitude on life in multi-racial society; 7) network quality with peer group; 8) level of community involvement; and 9) level of religious practices. The study involved 2538 respondents indicated there were significant differences between socio-demographic factors of gender, race and educational background to the social bonding among the youth. However, socio-demographic factors such as residential areas (urban, small town and rural) and type of house occupied (bungalow, terrace house, apartment and village house) do no have no impact on the difference in social bonding among youth in Malaysia. The findings also shows that the age, parental income and number of siblings has a small but positive correlation to the social bonding of youth.

Key words: Socio-demographic, Social bonding, Youth.

INTRODUCTION

Population statistics show that over 40% of Malaysians are aged between 15 and 39 years (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2002). Youth will be seen as the country's leaders in the future. To become a partner in national development, the youth should prepare themselves with the knowledge and skills required. Thus, positive youth development need to focus on the social bonding aspect of the current youth. In other words, what is lacking in the social bonding practices of youth at the present time it would have a big impact on society and the country's future.

Social Bonding Theory, previously known as Social Control Theory states that the relationship, commitment, values, norms and beliefs encourage someone not to break the law. Thomas (1996) refers to the social bonding as the belief of the individual to the values and norms in society, that rules and laws are something that should be followed. Behaviors that violate norms by an individual are caused by weakness of the individual's own social bonding with the community (Hirschi, 1969).

Previous studies showed that socio-demographic factors affect the social bonding of youth. According to Erikson (1998), individuals between the ages of 12 to 18 years will begin to develop their own personality and identity, and at the same time dependence on society will become less and eroded. This situation will cause the youth to be easily influenced to the environment as well as peers that can cause them to be involved with the activities of misconduct.

Besides, according to Erikson, (1998), the difference was significant in the middle of youths aged 19 to 25 years that emphasizes relationships and creating commitments as example of commitment of relationships between men and women. Success in this regard will further strengthen their social bonding (Erikson, 1998). In other words, the youth in this age group will start a more meaningful relationship in their lives.

In the meantime, Hirsci, (1969) states that family structure plays an important role and have an impact on strengthening the social bonding of an individual. According to him, the family is a major factor contributing to the formation of children's social bonding. The strength of family relationships with children will have a positive impact on behavior that is learned by the children themselves.

In a separate study conducted by Nobaya *et al*., (2008) on the level of unity of the Malay youth and non-Malay youth in Malaysia's multicultural society, the study found that early signs indicate more Malays youths were willing to celebrate diversity than non-Malays youths. In this study, although the same unity campaign were accepted by the respondents, but there are different effects in their social bonding practices in celebrating diversity.

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Socio-demographic factors on differences in educational backgrounds also showed differences in the social bonding practices of the youth. A study by Turiman *et al*., (2009) showed that youth who have a background of pre-university education and above, have better social bonding than youth who have educational background in the secondary school level.

Based on the previous studies, the socio-demographic factors in determining the social bonding of youth need to be considered by all interested parties.

Method:

This article is based on a quantitative study using the survey method. The study population consists of youth aged 15 to 25 years confined to Peninsular Malaysia only. Researchers have used the stratified random sampling. Four zones representing every state in Peninsular Malaysia was divided, in which the northern zone (Kedah, Perlis, Penang and Perak), the middle zon (Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor), south zone (Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and Johor) and the east zone (Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu). State elected to represent each zone is Penang (north zone), Selangor (central zone), Terengganu (east zone) dan Johor (southern zone). A total of 2538 respondents participated in this study. Fieldwork was conducted between February and May 2007.

Results:

Data were collected using self-administered questionnaire. Researchers have developed a new survey instrument, in which there are nine indicators of the social bonding among youth has been identified, such as: 1) Spirit of citizenship; 2) Quality of Family Communication; 3) Quality of Communication with Teachers and Adults; 4) Time Management Pattern; 5) Healthy Habit Level; 6) Attitude of Life in Multi-racial Society; 7) Network quality with peer group; 8) Community Involvement Level; and, 9) Religious Practices Level. 5 point likert scale was used for each variable indicators of social bonding. On average, through the reliability test, Cronbach alpha values for each variable is 0.839. Results of reliability tests is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The reliability level for each indicator of social bonding.

Social Bonding Indicator	Statement Number	Alpha Cronbach
Spirit of citizenship	14	0.858
Family communication quality	8	0.850
Quality of communication with teachers and adults	8	0.778
Time management pattern	5	0.755
Healthy habit level	8	0.724
Attitude of life in multi-racial society	19	0.893
Network quality with peer group	7	0.828
Community involvement level	7	0.839
Religious practices level	9	0.909

Table 2 shows the findings of an independent t-test to clarify the comparison between the social bonding of youth in Malaysia with socio-demographic factors selected. The study found a significant differences between the socio-demographic factors on gender and youth social bonding, in which, female youths (M= 3.3831, SP= .50334) have a slightly higher mean score than male youths [M= 3.3146, SP= .51080; $t(2527) = -3.393$ $p=$ .001]. The study also showed there are significant differences between socio-demographic factors of race and social bonding youth, in which, Malay youths (M= 3.4019, SP= .46971) have higher mean score than non-Malay youths [M= 3.2581, SP= .55416; $t(2527)= 6.965$ $p=$ .000].

Likewise with socio-demographic factors according to the educational background in which the study found a significant difference between the categories of secondary school youth and youth under the category of pre-university and above. The study found that youths with a history of pre-university education (M= 3.4655, SP= .45993) is seen to have a higher mean score than those of youth with a history of secondary education and below [M= 3.1611, SP= .55950; $t(1208) = -10.380$ $p = .000$].

Table 2: Difference on social bonding between selected socio-demographic factors of youth using independent t-test.

Variable	n	Mean	S.D	*t*	*p*
Gender				-3.393	.001
Male	1312	3.3146	.51080		
Female	1215	3.3831	.50334		
Race				6.965	.000
Malay	1572	3.4019	.46971		
Non-Malay	955	3.2581	.55416		
Education				-10.380	.000
Secondary school & below	545	3.1611	.55950		
Pre-university & above	663	3.4655	.45993		

One way-ANOVA test was used to see a comparison in the social bonding of Malaysian youth with two socio-demographic factors, namely the area of residence and type of accommodation. Results of one way-ANOVA test is displayed in Table 3.

Socio-demographic factors such as residential areas and types of houses occupied seem to have no impact on the difference in social bonding among youth in Malaysia. For the social bonding of youth according to three categories of residential areas, the highest mean score recorded for the youth who live in urban areas (mean = 3.3632), followed by the youth who live in rural areas (mean=3.3384), while youth who live in the small town had the lowest mean score (mean = 3.3288).

Mean score for the type of accommodation shows that the highest mean recorded for the youth who live in bungalows (mean = 3.4213) followed by terraced houses (mean = 3.3506), village houses (mean = 3.3431) and apartments (mean = 3.3353). In summary, the findings of one-way-ANOVA showed that there were no significant gaps in the social bonding of youth in Malaysia by residential area and type of house occupied by them. This also means that residential areas (cities, small town and rural areas) and type-occupied houses (bungalows, terrace houses, apartments and village houses) showed no difference in the youth social bonding.

Table 3: Difference on social bonding between selected socio-demographic factors of youth using *ANOVA.*

Variable	n	Mean	S.D	F	*p*
Residential area				1.016	.362
Urban	1169	3.3632	.50411		
Small town	476	3.3288	.52217		
Rural	873	3.3384	.50731		
Type of accommodation				.946	.417
Bungalow	126	3.4213	.57398		
Terrace House	1217	3.3506	.51535		
Apartment	190	3.3353	.49648		
Village House	973	3.3431	.48649		

Subsequently, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to understand the relationship between various socio-demographic variables with the social bonding of youth in Malaysia. The findings in Table 4 shows the age, parental income and number of siblings has a small but positive correlation to the social bonding of youth.

Table 4. The Relation Between Various Socio-Demographic Variables With The Social Bonding Of Youth.

Variables	*r*	*p*
Age	.177**	.000
Parents' income	.067**	.001
Number of siblings	.058**	.004

**: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Discussion:

The findings indicated that there were differences in the social bonding among the youth according to socio-demographic factors like age, gender, race and education level. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Erikson, 1998; Nobaya, *et al*. 2008; Turiman, *et al*. 2009).

Overall, female youth have better social bonding than male youth in terms of spirit of citizenship, quality of family communication, quality of communication with teachers and adults, time management pattern, healthy habit level, attitude of life in multi-racial society, network quality with peer group, community involvement level, and religious practices level. Differences of social bonding between youth male and youth female may be influenced by other factors such as parental upbringing. Kosterman, *et al*. (2004) states that care provided by parents affect antisocial behavior boys and girls, especially when viewed in terms of parenting by fathers. Based on the model of social development (Konsterman *et al*. 2004), the overall girls' antisocial behavior is less than the boys.

In the meantime, social bonding of Malay youths are better than non-Malay youths in terms of spirit of citizenship, quality of family communication, quality of communication with teachers and adults, time management pattern, healthy habit level, attitude of life in multi-racial society, network quality with peer group, community involvement level, and religious practices level.

Differences of social bonding between the races, does not mean that shows the weakness of social bonding by non-Malay youths. This is because the statistics in Malaysia indicate that social problems among youth are not only directed at certain races (Uthaya & Raman, 2009). Nevertheless, if viewed in the context of attitudes of life in multi-racial society, which is one of the indicators measured in this study, finding are consistent with previous studies by Nobaya *et al*. (2008), in which, more Malay youths celebrating diversity compared to non-Malay youths.

An analysis of the study also found that social bonding among the youth in pre-university and above are better than the youth in secondary schools in terms of spirit of citizenship, quality of family communication,

quality of communication with teachers and adults, time management pattern, healthy habit level, attitude of life in multi-racial society, network quality with peer group, community involvement level, and religious practices level.

This is probably influenced by other factors such as exposure to different learning environment among youths namely environment at schools that is probably different in institutions of higher learning with opportunities for youths in institutions of higher learning to carry out activities such as community service, sports and activity orientation team (Mohamad Rezal, 2009).

Nevertheless, there were no significant differences in terms of social bonding among the youth, if measured from socio-demographic factors such as residential areas and type-occupied houses. This means both these factors not much affect the difference in sosial bonding of youth.

Meanwhile, Pearson correlation analysis show the age, parental income and number of siblings has a small but positive correlation to the social bonding of youth. This explains that increasing age will make the youth social bonding improved. Similarly, the factor of parental income and number of siblings. The increase is happening to both of these factors will cause an increase in social bonding among the youth.

Conclusion:

All parties put high expectations for youth to become leaders who can build a respectable civilization in the future. However, the problems that hit the youth of today seems like no end. This situation provides a great challenge to any efforts towards youth development. Thus, the youth development efforts at any time was necessary to focus on the social bonding aspect of the youth. It is a very important that the responsible party understands what the real situation prevailing on the social bonding aspect of the youth of today and try to find the best solution. In addition, the rapid modernization is affecting the changes in social relations among them. Thus, the appropriate approach should be taken with the current situation that struck the youth.

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